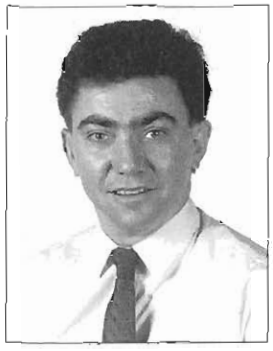
Finnish Emigration to Australia: A Bitter-Sweet Decision



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Abstract

The Finnish community within Australia is one which receives little recognition in comparison to other ethnic groups, probably due to its relatively small size. Yet, it is a little known fact that after Sweden, America and Canada the next most popular destination for Finnish emigrants was Australia. Why did they go to Australia? What were their motives? What were their expectations and were these realised upon arrival?

In the Australian winter of 1994 I conducted a large scale sociolinguistic study of three generational groups of Finnish Australians. All interviews were conducted in English. Linguistically, these interviews were most revealing, but they were also quite revealing from a socio-historic point of view. As I enquired, using questions which made comparisons between Finland and Australia, interesting observations arose from my Finnish informants, observations not always flattering for Australia.

This paper will present a brief review of the history of Finnish emigration to Australia before examining and discussing the opinions offered by my informants. These opinions touch upon personal identity, citizenship, adaptation to the Australian way of life, working conditions in Australia and Finland and how Australia has changed since the post-war years.

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1. Finnish Migration to Australia

Australia's history is indelibly marked by the influence of various migrationary periods and ethnic groups, of which the Finnish immigrants would prove significant. Besides the initial pioneering immigrants there were three periods of Finnish migration to Australia: those who were attracted by the great Australian Gold Rush 1851–62; the period of Australian economic expansion 1893–1930; and the post World War Two period of 1945 to the mid 1970s, during which Australia embarked upon an ambitious migration policy in an attempt to bolster its population for reasons of national defence and internal nation-building. In addition to these periods, there was also sporadic migration of seamen, in some instances whole crews of ships, who would desert upon arrival at an Australian port and at the turn of the century various colonies were also established based upon utopian or religious philosophies.

The first Finnish born person to arrive in Australia was Herman Dietrich Spöring, a crewman aboard Cook's 1770 voyage of discovery. Spöring made several significant zoological drawings during this voyage. Much of the early contact with Australia took place through Finnish seaman. It is estimated that by 1860 there were approximately 11,000 Finn-

ish seamen sailing on Finnish ships. However, because they were usually poor and had no family there is no concrete evidence of Finns having settled and died in Australia prior to 1851[1]. Until this date Australia's economy had not exerted a great enough attraction to entice large scale immigration from Finland.

In 1851 the great Australian Gold Rush began. As a result, by 1861 Australia's population had grown from 405,000 to 1,145,000. Koivukangas (1986: 66–71) estimates that approximately 400 Finns, mostly young men, emigrated during this period to Australia. One interesting character was that of "Russian Jack", a man reported to have been seven feet tall, who was famous for his strength and loyalty. He acquired legendary status and is today a by-word in Australia for the concept of Australian mateship. It is not clear whether he was actually Finnish or Russian, as many Finns were referred to as Russian, Finland at the time belonging to the Russian empire. Finns were also often referred to by nick-names, and still are today, because of the difficulty of Finnish names for English speakers.

Between 1880 and 1901 the population of Australia grew from 2.3 million to 3.8 million. During the 1890s Australia would enter a great period of prosperity and there would be a renewed interest in attracting emigrants. The Queensland government, in particular, was interested in attracting extensive immigration from Scandinavian countries. As a result, Finns established an attempted socialist community near Nambour named *Kalevan Kansa* (The People of Kaleva) led by Matti Kurikka[2], banana plantations in Gympie and Wovi, sugar plantations in Long Pocket, tobacco farms at Mareeba and, perhaps most significantly, began to be part of the rapidly expanding mining community of Mt. Isa, in mid-outback Queensland, where their numbers would reach 300 by 1930 and over a 1000 by the mid 1960s (Koivukangas 1986: 264–67). By the mid 1920s Finnish communities were well established throughout every state of Australia, in particular those placed along the east coast of Australia.

There was a rapid decline in the number of immigrants entering Australia during the Great Depression. This pattern would also ring true for Finnish immigrants. In 1939 *Suomi*[3] stated that Finnish migration had been at a virtual standstill during that decade with only a 100 Finns having landed. However, what did became significant, from this point on, was the notable increase in the proportion of Finnish women landing in Australia, either to join their husbands or fiancees or travelling in groups. Group migration, or "pipeline migration", was an established feature of Finnish migration. There was also a virtual standstill of all immigration during World War Two but after the war there was a concerted effort by the Australian government to attract new Australians to our shores. In 1957 Finns began to answer this call because of the difficult financial situation in Finland at the time, mainly high unemployment, and because the Australian government was offering assisted passages (1/4–1/3 of the fare). By the late 1960s potential Finnish immigrants only had to contribute $25 to their passage. This cheap fare helped to contribute to the number of immigrants who left Finland simply for adventure. Although immigration still continued into the 1970s, the main wave of immigrants came out in the 1950s and 1960s. Since the late 1970s onwards immigration to Australia has been quite restricted, to all nationalities.

According to Koivukangas (1975:186) the main reasons for men wanting to immigrate to Australia were, in descending order, general economic reasons, unemployment, love for adventure and "other reasons". For women the reasons were, again in descending order, "other reasons", love for adventure, keeping the family together and unemployment. My informants generally seemed to corroborate these results. Finns adapted well to Australian society economically, due to their diligence. Socially, however, they have not been as successful. In part the English language has proven to be a barrier to this success. In addition, the first generation Australian Finns, like the American, Canadian and Swedish Finns have established their own sub-culture. With the formation of local Finnish halls, clubs, temperance societies and the Finnish Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Finnish Church, a nationally organised and funded retirement village entitled Finlandia Village,

and two long running Finnish newspapers (*Suomi Newspaper* and *Australian Finlandia News*[4]) we can easily comprehend why the Finnish language is still their primary language of communication. These institutions tend to support language maintenance. However, due to various social factors, including the present overall small number of Finnish immigrants, language shift, even language death, took place or is quickly taking place amongst the Finnish community in Australia. Most of the above mentioned institutions are losing their ground support as the younger immigrants, those who were children upon arrival, and their children, fully integrate into the wider Australian community.

2. The Finnish Australian Community Today

Between 1865 to 1930 approximately 340,000 Finns emigrated to the United States and between 1865 to the 1960s approximately 80,000 Finns migrated to Canada. When America began to limit immigration in the 1920s, Canada, along with Australia, became one of the most important countries of destination, apart from Sweden. In fact, many of my informants stated that they would have preferred to emigrate to Canada, but that Canada had already begun to close its borders to immigrants in the early 1960s. To date, approximately 20,000 Finns have emigrated to Australia[5]. Owing to a vigorous post-war social expansion programme Australia's greatest intake of immigrants was to occur between 1950–1970. The following figures reflect the increase in numbers for Finnish emigrants to Australia throughout this century. Prior to 1921 Finns had been counted among the Russians in Australian statistics of population, so we have no accurate census data relating to Finnish immigrants prior to 1921.

Number of Finnish born immigrants residing in Australia.

Year	Males	Females	Total
1921	1 227	131	1 358
1954	1 334	399	1 733
1961	3 939	2 549	6 488
1971	5 747	4 612	10 359
1991	4 431	4 679	9 110

The figures provided relate only to the year identified, they are not necessarily cumulative. Quite clearly the intake of Finnish immigrants increased during the period 1954–1971. It is also noticeable that more women began emigrating after World War Two. This was mainly due to young couples and families arriving in Australia. The number of Finnish born immigrants are now starting to decrease. This can be attributed to several factors. Those who emigrated during the 1950–1970 period are now retired and becoming elderly, as most were aged between approximately 25–40 years upon arrival, and their children are presently middle-aged. In addition to these factors, it has been estimated[6] that approximately 30% of those who emigrate from Finland return. There are very few "old-timers", that is, Finns who emigrated to Australia prior to World War Two, still alive in Australia today.

3. The Finnish-Australian English Corpus

The data for this paper arose as I began to conduct interviews for a sociolinguistic study of the English of Finnish immigrants now permanently settled in Australia. The following only offers a brief outline of the manner in which I compiled the Finnish-Australian English Corpus (FAEC). For greater detail of the interview procedure employed and the nature of the study refer to Watson (1995 & 1996).

I decided to predominantly concentrate upon the post-war immigrants and their offspring. Most of the immigrants interviewed seem to have come from Pohjanmaa (a western province of Finland) and, or, Eastern Finland, historically two of the least affluent areas of Finland and many of those from Eastern Finland had originally come from Karelia (previously the easternmost province of Finland, which was lost to Russia during World War Two). Interestingly, many of these Karelians expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which they had been received or settled within Finland after the second world war and included this as a factor for wanting to emigrate. Most of my informants had had a limited education in Finland, often interrupted by the Winter and Continuation wars with Russia, and came from a working class background. Many of the

older male informants were war veterans. Very few of those interviewed could speak any English at all upon arrival to Australia. They had predominantly been tradespeople or small-farm holders back in Finland. Many stated adventure as their reason for migration and thought that they were only going to stay for two years before returning to Finland.

I initially made contact with the various Finnish communities by writing to the Finnish Australian Clubs in the capital cities of the east coast of Australia (Australia's most densely populated seaboard). I concentrated on the east coast of Australia as that is where the majority of the Finns now reside. I then relied upon word-of-mouth for introductions. In general, I was overwhelmed from offers from those who wished to be interviewed. As a result, I interviewed a total of 135 informants from Hobart, Melbourne, Canberra, the Central Coast (just above Sydney) and Brisbane over a period of 4 months.

The informants were classified according to three criteria. Those who were over the age of 18 years upon arrival into Australia I have collectively named 1A. Those who were the children of these immigrants, born in Finland, but under the age of 12 are collectively named 1B and those who were born in Australia of Finnish 1A immigrants I have collectively named 2ND generation Finns. I made the distinction between 1A and 1B on the basis of the critical period hypothesis (refer to Lenneberg 1967). Admittedly, this was an arbitrary decision and this theory is still under debate. Even so, all 1B informants underwent the Australian schooling system and had clearly been influenced by this factor. I avoided interviewing informants which fell between the age of 12 to 18 years. I interviewed a total of 67 1A immigrants, 38 1B immigrants and 30 2ND generation Finns.

I concentrated on collecting most of my data from the 1A group as they will probably yield the most interesting phonological, lexical and morpho-syntactic results. However, for comparative reasons (against both the 1A group and other existing corpora of American Finns) I needed a good representation of the other two groups. By the completion of the transcription procedure the corpus will consist of 60 1A interviews, 30 1B interviews and 30 2ND generation interviews. Therefore, the overall corpus will consist of 120 transcribed interviews, each interview lasting, on average, between 60 to 90 minutes in duration. Both sexes are almost equally represented in each generational group.

For the purposes of this paper we shall only be reviewing the opinions of the 1A informants because it was they who decided to leave their home country and it is they who can offer reflections upon Finland and put forward comparisons between their home country and their newly adopted country, Australia.

4. Observations

As previously mentioned the compilation of the FAEC was intended to be a predominantly linguistic endeavour. However, owing to my questioning technique I was also able to gather a considerable amount of socio-historic information. The following section reveals certain trends and observations amongst my 1A informants in relation to this information. Although these trends

should not be considered as hard and fast, it is fair to assume that they are relatively representative of the English speaking Finnish-Australian community at large, as all the interviewees were randomly selected from all the major Finnish population centres of eastern Australia and both sexes are equally represented. Let us now turn our attention to some of the opinions put forward by my Finnish respondents, those touching upon citizenship, personal identity, adaptation to the Australian way of life, how Australia has changed since the post-war years, comparisons between working conditions in Finland and Australia, attitudes towards republicanism and whether or not they are satisfied with their life in Australia.

4.1 Citizenship

60% of the respondents said their citizenship was Australian and 40% Finnish but these results can be deceptive. Most of the interviewees did not feel a great need to possess Australian citizenship. Those that had taken up Australian citizenship had only done so for practical reasons, mainly in relation to securing their place of employment, for instance if they worked for the government or, then, so as to ensure that their spouses were eligible for employment or entrance into various scholarship programmes and so on. The following reply tends to highlight the general indifference to Australian citizenship:

Interviewee 1, female, 34 years. (What citizenship do you have at the moment?) – *Finnish.* – (Do you think, have you ever thought about that question, what you might do in the future?) – *Yeah...* – (With respect to your citizenship?) – *Well, it's just a practical question, if, we for some reason left Australia we would try to get Australian citizenship.* – (Before leaving?) – *Yes. But's uh, I don't feel, I, I'm not patriotic, it doesn't mean anything to me, whether I'm Australian or whether I would have Australian of Finnish passport. The only thing is that we want to live in Australia permanently and that we want, want to keep chance if we went away, to come back.* – (Yeah.) – *But at the moment, being a Finnish citizen, perhaps, if we live here, gives us certain freedom, for example, if children wanted to go to Europe and study there, it would be a lot easier to get around in different countries and live in different countries even.* – (That's true.) – *So it's a, it's a practical question very much.*

4.2 Identity

The follow-up question "How would you describe your identity, do you feel as if you are more Finnish, equally Finnish and Australian or more Australian?" tended to produce some very interesting results. 28.33% said they felt more Finnish, 48.34% said they felt equally Finnish and Australian, and 23.33% more Australian. Clearly the informants differentiated between a formal document stating their national identity and their actual feelings on identity. Many stated that it was quite difficult to adequately express their feelings on this matter. What is interesting is that it is only a minority of the informants who solely feel an affinity with Finland. Perhaps this should not be all that surprising if we consider the fact that the majority of the informants have lived a greater period of their life in Australia than they have in Finland. The following extracts offer further insights into the nature of their feelings about personal identity.

More Finnish: ***Interviewee 2, male, 54 years.*** (How would you describe your identity today, do you feel as if you are more Finnish, or equally Finnish and Australian, or more Australian?) – *No, Finn.* – (You're a Finn?) – *Yeah, that's for sure.* – (Okay, uh, why are you so sure about that?) – *Because, I'm born Finland, you know, and, nothing, I can't complain of Australia, you know.* – (Mhm.) – *That's a my home now. But, my heart is Finn.* – (Mhm, mhm.) – *But I thi..., I think I'm never move up to Finland, no.* – (So you don't miss Finland?) – No. No, absolutely not.

Equally Finnish and Australian: ***Interviewee 3, female, 56 years.*** – *Oh I have to say my, my homeland, this is my homeland now. I, I'm quite happy here but I still have the very strong Finnish roots with a, with a, mm..., which way there is.* – (Mhm.) – *I'm not really like a Australian person but this is still my homeland.* – (Mm.) – *Still uh, already, I mean I'm quite happy here and I don't want to go back.* – (Mm.) – *But I still have mine, these*

roots. – (Mm, mm, so perhaps it's fair to say that you're at least equally Finnish and Australian. About the same, or would you say a little bit more Finnish still?) – *Yeah, um, yeah, yeah.* – (I know it's difficult.) – *Yeah, it's difficult to be exact, uh, because yeah, well, maybe. Now I'm retired and I go to those clubs and, it..., I'm like a F..., like a Finnish person in Australia, uh Finnish. Not the Finnish person in Finland.*

More Australian: ***Interviewee 4, female, 64 years.*** – *I think I am more Australian now than Finnish, even I, I don't speak very good English but I, I like to be and I feel like this is my home.* – (Mmm, what makes you feel more Australian?) – *I don't know. I think this something, must be something to do this weather even now is bad, but much, much better than in Finland and looks to me better so much for me, I think. And people are friendly here and more open and I, I feel like that anyhow I don't know if I'm right or not but I like to be here.* – (Yeah, okay. Do you feel as if you are one of the gang when you are with other Australians? Or do you feel a little left out?) – *Maybe sometimes I feel, feel that like I'm little bit, little bit left out but not ..., not many times.* – (What makes you feel like that when, when do you get that feeling? What do you think is making you feel that way?) – *Don't feel that way so much anymore, maybe it was my, because I didn't understand everything before. I just start to think I, I don't feel that anymore so much. I think they are same human beings as me.*

4.3 Adaptation to the Australian way of life

To the question "How would you say you have adapted to Australian life and society? Would you say that it has been hard, that you have been homesick, that there have been no real problems or that it has been easy?" 22% answered it was hard to adjust, that they were homesick, 42% said it was easy and 36% of respondents had no real problems.

These results tend to suggest that adjustment to a new culture and language was not too traumatic for our Finnish immigrants. However, what should be remembered is that over time the hardships of living in a strange environment are often forgotten or at least such memories are tempered. Many of my female informants seemed to have suffered worse. They were often at home with the children and led a very limited life. Ironically, on average, it would be they who would gain the more competent language skills. Conversely, the men were too busy with work, often working alongside other Finnish men, to have time to be homesick. The women seemed to have missed their family back in Finland more so than the men. It was not unusual for my informants to mention that it took them approximately 5 years to overcome this homesickness. This period of time was also often mentioned in relation to how long it took them to become at least competently functional in the English language. Undoubtedly, these two factors are closely linked. One factor which seemed to help the group under study to adjust to Australia was the relaxed attitudes of the Australian people. Many of my informants commented on the congeniality of Australian people and very few remember having experienced open racial discrimination. The two greatest factors in relation to not adjusting to Australian society were homesickness and the language barrier. Many of these immigrants overcame their homesickness but not so the language barrier, as the following extract highlights:

Interviewee 5, female, 66 years. – *I was so homesick. In a five year I cried all a time, I wanted to go back. It was terrible for me first. And I think so it was just that because I am from the large family and also because um, I haven't been nowhere of the main circle of the family. Because I have born in Rauma, I came from the Rauma. I haven't been anywhere else. Um.* – (Okay, so how did you get over this homesickness?) – *Um, it just 'weari' away. I won't go to the Finland now.* – (Have you been to Finland?) – *No. I haven't been never.* – (In 35 years...) – *That's right.* – (You have never returned to Finland?) – *No, my husband has been twice and my family has been here. Um, but I haven't gone because I am scared 'eti' I coming a homesick again.*

In response to the question "How do you feel about Australia in general, negative, neutral or positive?" 74 % felt positive and 26% neutral. No one felt negative in this sense. Perhaps these figures are slightly skewed, in that I believe the informants were ret-

icent in putting forward any negative opinions of Australia. Even so, the majority certainly seemed to be content with their life in Australia. The most often cited reasons for this contentment centred around low taxation, though many commented that taxation is no longer as low as it was upon their arrival, an abundance of work opportunities, though this too has dramatically changed, cheap affordable housing, which is again undergoing drastic change, a sense of space and freedom and pleasant weather conditions. These factors are quite clearly in contrast to the closed, expensive society of Finland in the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike Australia, which was experiencing an economic boom throughout the post-war years, Finland had been subjected to heavy war-repatriations to the USSR, major social restructuring programmes and a serious economic depression during the 1960s. It is little wonder that most of the informants found Australia a country which offered a sense of freedom and entrepreneurial opportunities. One informant even commented on how refreshing it had been to not see many policemen or military personnel on the streets.

Positive: ***Interviewee 6, male, 59 years.*** – *Well, I think and this a good country, if you mean that. And what I say in the living is that ... here is a lot easier what a over there, and one thing people more 'lax here what they're back home.* – (More?) – *Relax.* – (Aha. Yeah, what do mean by that?) – *Oh, well they more open, way they talk and a usually back home people more tight, they will not talk their own problems or they don't mixed for the new people much what they doing here: you can just here for the any place and you can start talking and they don't mind to talk you back and I used to back home and a is not easier for that way find it, they more, more open here what they are back home.*

"Are you happy in Australia? Knowing what you know now do you think you would come again?" 50% said they would definitely come again to Australia, 20% would not come again and 30% would probably come again. As we examine the results for this question there appears to be a contradiction against the above results, 20 percent of my informants now do not seem so enamoured with Australia, and a further 30 percent are hesitant. It

seems that they still have a sense of longing for their homeland, a deep-seated homesickness, a need to return to their own culture. Much of this is language based, they feel isolated in Australia. Ironically, many of my informants had returned several times during their years in Australia and many of these had commented on how stiff and closed Finnish society seems to be and that they could no longer live in such an environment, yet they still long for Finland. Many others also made comment upon the harsh climate of Finland.

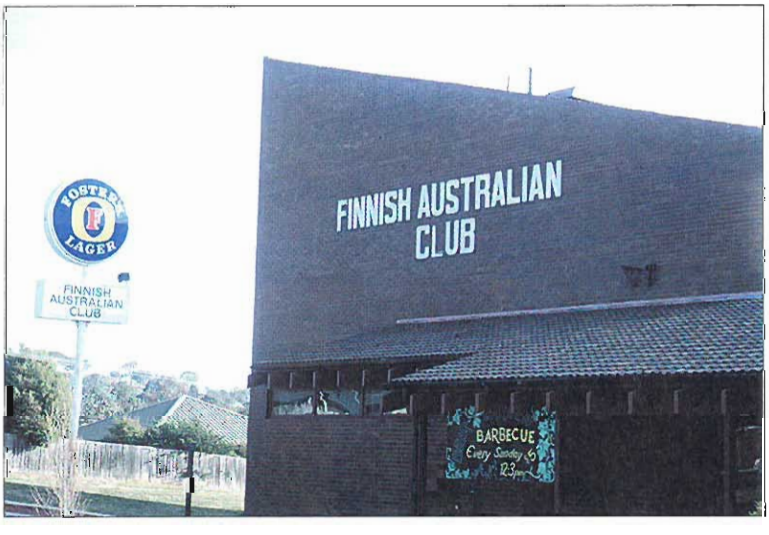
Would not come: ***Interviewee 7, female, 48 years.*** – (Are you happy in Australia?) – *Yeah.* – (Do you think you would come again?) – *Uh, I don't think I would come back again, if I was in this s..., um, uh, mind, as I was when I left. How I put that one up I don't know?* – (Uh, can you explain that a bit?) – *Uh, I, now I'm, when you thinking you getting old.* – (Mhm.) – *I think you shouldn't leave your country. Never ever, because your heart is always on one side sort of half and half.* – (Mhm.) – *Even you s..., you, you know, like to live here, but then y..., other half is still there because you have born in Finland.* – (Mhm.) – *And now if I was in this mind, when I was, uh, when we left, I don't think I could do it.* – (Mhm.) – *I couldn't do it now. To migrated again, I think.* – (Okay.) – *It's scary, because when you get older, to your, ideas changing.*

4.4 How has Australia changed since the post-war years?

The majority of my informants arrived in Australia in the post-war period, between 1950 to 1965. Their first impressions of Australia were certainly less than flattering. They thought it to be a backward country lacking in many basic amenities and were genuinely shocked and dissatisfied with the standard of hygiene, housing, working conditions, shopping facilities, availability of consumer goods and the attitude towards migrants by the general populace. Women were seemingly only concerned with being perceived as proper ladies and the men were often thought of as quite "dinkum", "people went to the pub all the time".

Although the general values were a shock to the rather lutheran like Finns they also found it amusing and refreshing. Many have commented on how this general attitude has faded and speak of this fading with a certain tinge of loss. It seems that as Australia has caught up with the rest of the world, as we have come in out of the cold of physical and cultural isolation, we have also lost an element of our innocent naivety. Mind you this naivety was often tainted by xenophobia and we were nearly always culturally biased towards British ideals. In this section we will examine some comments which touch upon these criticisms of a time which, ironically, has often been viewed as one of Australia's golden periods. However, when examined through the eyes of Finnish immigrants it seems we need to reassess this interpretation.

Interviewee 8, female, 66 years. – *Shoppingk was so different and we thought so then Australia was a fifty year behind after Europe I'm sorry to say, at the time.* – (Many people have told me this, you're not the first one.What other changes do you notice?) – *Um, for the, in a, at the time when we came it was children clothing, in the winter time here were children oh in the*



clothing you could not buy nothing, you, there was no children's stockings, there was only horrible school shoes, either brown, brown or black. And, ah children were walking here in the winter time without stockings on just a bare legs, oh, don't seem to having even clothingk. – (Anything else?) – *People went to the pub all the time.* – (You say people, do you mean women also or the men?) – *Um, I don't know, um I don't know about the woman. I don't know any woman went to the pub, but men went, all from the, when we lived at the <place name>. Only man who probably came out of the, straight from the work was my husband. They all went to pub.* – (Um, um.) – *And because of the beer was so way of the Australia life.* – (Um.) – *I think so was a way of the how they lived.*

Interviewee 9, female, 48 years. – *I think we have developed a lot in Australia now.* – (Mhm.) – *Since we came, because, many things I, I can say was like behind Finland when we migrated. You couldn't get things from here as you could back home, back to home. And uh, materials, all the furnitures, and uh, even shoes, the quality wasn't all that good as we had back home, or the styles or fittings and...* – (Mhm.) – *And uh, then they didn't have proper, uh, heating systems, I still haven't, we haven't got the proper heating systems, or, you know, how the houses are built, they are like summer houses, and like as, put it example in Canberra and even still in Gosford, you know, they should build a, you know, differently. But uh, I think like a electronics and uh, those things, you know, they were behind those days, but since, I s..., would say '75, '76, things start, uh, started changing here.*

Fortunately, many of these criticisms can now only be levelled at the past. Most of my informants also commented on how Australia in the 1990s is a far different Australia to that of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The large number of, and relatively sudden influx of, immigrants to Australia during this period introduced a more cosmopolitan lifestyle almost overnight. Standards were lifted, the availability of food became more diverse, housing and hygiene improved, for instance no longer do we see sawdust on the floor of the butchers' shops, a fact which used to horrify our Finnish immigrants.

These changes cannot only be attributed to our bolstered immigration policy but also to the advancement of telecommunications. We can no longer remain physically isolated. Our immigrants brought the world to us, in very large numbers, and the world will remain in our backyard due to telecommunication. Australia is, overall, a more competitive country than it once was, due to this intrusion of the outside world and the fact that we can no longer rely upon the wealth of our natural resources to provide a high standard of living. High unemployment also seems to be a permanent factor. As a result our young are furthering their education to a greater extent, more people are attending tertiary educational institutes. The second and third generation of our immigrants now hold prominent social positions, we are no longer so obviously the white extremist nation we once were. We are even questioning our links with the monarchy of Great Britain. Social security has improved, educational aims have improved and in this new competitive framework many of our previous faults have been vastly improved. In this new, emerging Australia, one which is hungry to establish itself with an individual identity, one which now looks to Asia with receptive eyes rather than suspicion, it appears as if we can no longer call to mind the phrase "she'll be right" with as great a ease as we did not so long ago. The following extract reiterates this sentiment.

Interviewee 10, female, 46 years. – *Well, we not as easy-going as we used to be.* – (As a, as a people, do you mean?) – *Yeah. Like uh, in all the, hm, hm, hm, government departments are getting much tougher on you and they, sort of uh, are a real pain in the butt and I don't know, but it's not as free as it used to be. Sort of uh, maybe everybody's too busy nowadays and they're chasing the mighty dollar too much and that a way. It used to be an easier lifestyle than it is now.*

4.5 Differences in the working conditions between Finland and Australia

How do you think working conditions differed between Finland and Australia when you first ar-

rived? How do they differ now? Once again the image projected by my Finnish informants on this matter is less than flattering. Over 90 percent of the men worked or work in the building industry, primarily as carpenters or formworkers and the women were factory workers. Very few had office jobs as their language skills were insufficient for such jobs. Those that did have office jobs complained of discrimination in the office, both sexual and racial.

The main observations the Finns noticed upon arrival to Australia included poor standards of safety, poor amenities and very poor working conditions. The factories were very dirty, there was a lot of noise pollution and the machines were very archaic, often having been imported from Europe. Many of the men complained of very poor safety regulations, several had suffered serious industrial accidents. Another observation frequently put forward was that in Finland workers were expected to be multi-skilled in their field but that in Australia this was not encouraged. Often the unions did not want this. The following extract reflects some of these criticisms.

Interviewee 11, male, 62 years. – (How do you think working conditions differed between Finland and Australia when you first came here?) – *Mhm, it was uh, like day and night, so much difference.* – (Yeah?) – *Yeah, there was in the uh, wasn't any, any place even to eat lunch, has to find some corner, sittin' on floor. Uh, on my first job, it was s..., slaughteryard in uh, western NSW, really country side, it was big slaughteryard but uh, there wasn't anything anything really even show..., shower, uh there was uh, 2 taps, one taps, one tap was uh, what bring steam from sto..., shower had to..., have to organise that st..., steam on f...,stayin', on stayin' on side. And other tap there was cold water. And then you, you have make 'djustment for that steam and cold water to get on uh... Get to have shower....also there wasn't any, any, any, any, anything, they, they didn't do anything about safety. Worker's, worker's safety. Even in Brisbane uh, um, when I working on big, really big, who employ uh, nea..., more than 2000 uh, people altogether. Butchers or slaugtermans, they, they come to work, they workin' uh, by short, shorts and uh, barefoot. They didn't got any, any, anything on, on, no..., nothing, not, not helmets at all or anything like those.*

Several informants also commented on the relaxed attitude of Australian workers. They claimed they worked more thoroughly in Finland. Two reasons can be attributed for this. Firstly, there was an abundance of work in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s, the workers could afford to be relaxed in their attitudes, and secondly, the language barrier: "I think it was the language, because you couldn't speak much, you just worked."

Although my informants could not accurately state how conditions compared between Finland and Australia today, they did all state that working conditions have vastly improved in Australia over the last decade and that Australia's workforce now enjoys comparable working conditions to those enjoyed in Finland in earlier years. It seems that as Australia came of age through the 1980s and 1990s so too did our working conditions and attitude towards work.

4.6 Life expectations

This question "What do you think life will be like in the year 2000 and beyond?" elicited a mixed set of replies, but several trends did seem to arise. Firstly, most of the informants were quite sure that the relaxed, easy-going attitude of Australians and Australia has been lost forever, that our society has changed. Most viewed this loss as regrettable. In place of this society they envisage a society which will suffer high unemployment, that there will be a "lifetime recession" and one in which technology will "eat" the jobs. They are worried about an increase in street violence, claiming that crime is on the rise and getting out of control. In balance of this rather bleak outlook, others claim that society is changing for the better, that life is getting easier and easier. Others foresee a change in the make-up of our society, that the racial balance will shift towards a greater Asian percentage. This was generally viewed neutrally though one informant commented on how these Asians do not mix with the mainstream of society, an interesting observation coming from a member of the rather self-contained and closed society of Finnish mi-

grants. To generalise, the majority of these mainly retired informants were worried about the future prospects of their children and grandchildren but thought that Australia as a whole would generally improve as we enter the next millennium.

4.7 Attitudes towards republicanism

Quite clearly the majority of my informants (83%) would like to see Australia become a republic. Only 7.6% were unsure, and 9.4% negative. I would expect that, apart from British immigrants, this would be a general trend amongst most immigrant groups. Finland is itself a republic and fiercely defended itself during two campaigns in world war two. Most of my informants were categorical in their belief that Australia should convert to a republic but there was a small minority who were of a different opinion:

Interviewee 12, male, 67 years. – *Uh, nowadays they are looking, talking Australia as part of Asia and uh they uh try to talk this republic but uh, I think sudden change to republic is big trouble if you look at uh whatever these countries who is, who is separated from England, all this England imperium or commonwealth or whatever you call it, everybody they say 'mall countries are trouble. Look at, look at Africa, there's a big countries, what happened now? Everybody's now even nothing to eat and every money what they get they buyed some weapons and uh, kill somebody. I'm 'fraid something happen this area in Australia.*

Interviewee 13, male, 61 years. – *I certainly don't hope so.* – (You don't hope so?) – *No.* – (Why not?) – *Ah, somehow I like old royalty.* – (Aha, that's interesting.) – *I am very conventional.* – (That's interesting coming from a Finn, basically.) – Yeah.

"What are your opinions on the Australian flag, would you like to see it changed?" 42% of the respondents would like to see the Australian flag to be changed whereas 50% would not. 8% were non-committed in this issue. From these results we can deduce that the informants clearly differentiate between becoming a republic and changing the flag. Whereas 83% definitely wanted to become a republic only 42% want to see a change in the Australian flag. It seems that the Australian flag holds symbolic importance for many of my informants. It symbolises the country which first accepted them as immigrants, it is the flag to which 60% of them have turned to as Australian citizens. It reminds them of Australia's link to Britain and they seem to relish this link, even though they would also like to politically sever this link. One might argue that my Finnish informants are insensitive to the colonial implications of the Union Jack being present on the Australian flag, yet this seems strange coming from a people who had to fight bitterly, as recently as 1917, for their own independence from Russia. Many of my interviewees seemed to gain a sense of security and permanence from the current flag and the fact that it is already well recognised throughout the world. The following extract argues for the retention of the current Australian flag:

Interviewee 14, female, 51 years. – *I personally can't see any cha..., I don't believe in change like that.* – (Uhuh.) – *Because it what people are accustomed is the flag, they, they ne..., recognize their own flag, and they assimilate with it. You, you give a new flag and it's like taking something away from there that always belonged to them.* – (Uhuh.) – *That's my opinion about that.* – (Okay.) – *It's like make-believe, giving new flag.*

4.8 Satisfaction with the life in Australia

The great majority (98%) of the respondents were and had been happy with their life in Australia. 90% would emigrate again to Australia and 7% not. Finally, we can see from these two sets of results that overall my group of informants were quiet satisfied with their lives in Australia. These results do, in part, contradict the findings from section 4.3. The women seemed to be content because their family was near them, that is, their children had intermarried and often there were grandchildren. Family seems to come first in preference to feelings for their original homeland. The men saw satisfaction in having had a successful working life in Australia, many frequently commented on how they had done very well for themselves, far better than they would have

done in Finland. Ironically, it would be the men who often seemed to be least settled in Australia, family ties did not seem to be so weighty a matter for them, in their retirement many of them were homesick for the Finland of their youth. The reasons cited for not being content in Australia, for not wishing to emigrate again included a sense of lost business opportunities, and linguistic and cultural isolation.

Interviewee 15, female, 56 years. – (Knowing what you know now would you emigrate again to Australia, would you come again?) – *Um, maybe, sometimes I say, if I..., uh, like I said to..., before, sometimes I say, if I knew, I never, I, actually now I never go somewhere I don't know the language.* – (Aha.) – *Yeah.* – (So the language was the biggest problem?) – *But then... It was, yeah. But maybe it wasn't problem out them, because everything turned out, turned up right, so...*

Interviewee 16, female, 74 years. – (Are you happy with your life in Australia?) – *Oh, yes, I'm very happy. I like this um, this my, I have this my home and this my family, it's very good and Australia people is very good, this my neighbours and this um, I like this. I'm very happy now. But I like this Finnish, Finnish people this, some one.* – (Would you come to Australia again?) – *No, no, I think so, everybody speak English, he come to Australia.* – (Uhuh, uhuh, okay.) – *First time and this speak good language and much better.*

5. Conclusion

From this brief review a picture begins to emerge of the attitudes of our Finnish immigrants and of their initial impressions of Australia. Most came to Australia for an adventure, they were not economic or political immigrants. They found a country which offered them large potential, they enjoyed the sense of freedom which existed at the time and they still revel in the conducive climate. Approximately 70 percent of those immigrants who only intended to stay for two years decided to make Australia their home.

However, they were critical of the poor standards of living that existed at the time, particularly in reference to housing, health-care, availability of goods and working conditions. Yet, despite these criticisms they enjoyed the open and relaxed Australian lifestyle and the purchase power of their wages, benefits which were not available to them in Finland.

The most singular and pervasive complaint for these people was their inability to have adequately attained a competent level of proficiency in the English language. Due to their poor language skills, these Finns have remained on the outer fringes of Australian society, this has, in turn, led some to suffer cultural isolation and loneliness.

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Notes:

[1] Koivukangas (1986) makes this observation upon the basis of name searches through the 1847 Street Directory for Port Phillip (Melbourne) and pre-1850 street directories for Sydney, which contain the names, occupations, and addresses of the inhabitants. There were no recognisable Finnish names. Neither were Finnish names found amongst the oldest remaining gravestones in Sydney.

[2] This attempted colony would ultimately fail but Kurikka would move on to Canada to establish a community based upon similar utopian ideals, which would also fail a few years later. Refer to Koivukangas (1986: 87–92) for greater detail.

[3] Suomi is a Finnish language newspaper still in circulation today, published in Brisbane. This report can be found in the edition dated 10th August, 1939.

[4] Suomi newspaper was established in 1926, it is the oldest ethnic newspaper in Australia. Both newspapers offer a comprehensive list of Finnish Australian clubs (Suomen seurat), including contact addresses for New Zealand, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea.

[5] These figures have been attained from the Institute of Migration, Piispankatu 3, 20500, Turku, Finland.

[6] This estimation has been put forward by the Institute of migration, Piispankatu 3, 20500, Turku, Finland.